

Member Spotlight: Jessica Staheli

How Jessica Staheli found business through literature



Jessica Staheli is Executive Vice President of Scherzer International (SI), which has been providing specialized background reports since 1993. Jessica has over fifteen years of experience in background due-diligence and oversees SI's business development and account management. Jessica serves on SI's board of directors and is committed to partnering with clients to ensure that they receive the highest quality of service and information.

SI helps clients manage their risk with background reports for employment screening, business transactions and client acceptance. We offer a portfolio of scalable and customized reports for business transactions, client acceptance, employment and regulatory compliance. With a global scope of resources, SI works with clients all over the world to provide the best information available.

Jessica Staheli has two passions in life – one is her work for Scherzer International, helping to provide reassurance for businesses across the world, and the other is Victorian literature.

She may live in ultra-modern California, but there will always be a part of Jessica forever dedicated to Victorian-era London.

She is a long-time lover of literature from that period and took her degree and a masters in English when she was younger. While she finds it difficult to pick a favourite author – she likens it to picking a favourite child – she loves classic writers such as Charles Dickens and the Bronte sisters, but one figure that stands out for her is Geraldine Dewsbury.

She may not be a well-known name but Dewsbury was an influential and fairly radical figure on the Victorian literature scene, something that was uncommon for women at the time.

"I looked at her life, she was a publisher's reader so she read novels that had been submitted for publication and recommended whether they should be printed," Jessica says. "She was also a reviewer, so she was a woman in business and it's no wonder I'm really into her, she's fascinating and there are a lot of similarities with me."

As Jessica says, there are similarities with her role at Scherzer International. While Jessica and the company are involved in many private equity and M&A deals both domestically in the US and interna

tionally, their work is often done in the background, yet can prove significant and be the difference between a deal completing or not.

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The firm provides specialised background screening reports for M&A and investment due diligence, client acceptance, and employment and regulatory compliance. Its services have proven essential for informed decisions and sustainable risk management.

Jessica explains: "For example, before a private equity firm invests, they will have done a lot of their own due diligence, but they come to us to do an independent

background screening of the management team and sometimes the company itself.

"We are often one of the last steps in the process, but it is necessary in case we uncover criminal records, litigation or financial liabilities that weren't declared."

Scherzer International was founded in 1993 by Larry Scherzer, who is still president and CEO. The company's first major client was a private equity provider and is still a client to this day: "We've been working with many generations of people at that private equity firm as they've moved on and up."

I thought, 'I know how to write, and I know how to research', and then I found this job with Scherzer international. And I didn't even have to get on the freeway to get from my house to the office."

Scherzer International has since expanded to work with accounting firms and other sectors including asset-based lenders, investment banks and commercial banks in the US and around the world.

So how did a literature-obsessed person end up in a company like this?

Jessica's route to Scherzer International was not a conventional one. She had just completed her master's degree in Colorado but wanted to move to Los Angeles "because I was tired of being cold from November to May and wanted to live in Southern California."

Initially, she thought about getting a job as a teacher. "But I learnt very quickly that you can't make a living in L.A. County teaching part-time," she laughs.

She needed another plan: "I thought, 'I know how to write, and I know how to research', and then I found this job with Scherzer international. And I didn't even have to get on the freeway to get from my house to the office which in Los Angeles is a big deal!"

Jessica has been a part of the fabric of Scherzer International ever since, for the best part of 20 years, and has had a variety of roles in that time. "I joke that I've done everything except accounting," she laughs. "For instance, I have managed departments, I and was in quality assurance where I read and reviewed the reports and even dipped into IT when we developed our report writing system."

Jessica has been involved on the business development side of the company for about 10 years and is an executive director. "I'm on the board as a shareholder, so I feel like I'm helping to build something," she says. "I'm here for the for the long haul and invested in the company itself. And I really like where I work and the people that I work with."

But while Jessica loves the Victorian age, she is also forward-looking and has embraced the technological advances of the past 20 years to help her do the job more effectively.

She explains: "The industry has changed thanks to technology. When I first started, we were still faxing requests, writing all our reports on Word documents. Fast forward almost 20 years and now we can get secure, direct access to courts online and automate more of the process. We developed our own workflow and report writer system, which also increased our efficiency."

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"Technology has definitely changed along with the need for really strong compliance. Technology has helped with compliance as well because it strengthens secure systems, and we can quickly alert clients on changing regulations."

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"Twenty years ago, it was emails, phone calls and spreadsheets. Now, we have our internal web that is protected and all the resources are there.

Things that make life a lot easier. Another thing that makes life easier is that we can hop on a Teams call at any time, even though, for example, the chief compliance officer is in Florida and I'm in Los Angeles."

While it is almost second nature now, it is something that Jessica took to when it was widely implemented at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic last year when the US went into lockdown. "I took to it immediately," she says. "A lot of this technology has been around for a while, but we've been sort of forced to use it and learn new systems."

This obligation to learn and use new systems has been a silver lining to the disruption caused by the pandemic. Jessica adds: "For instance, I have one-on-one meetings with each of my team members every week. Before we switched to Teams when we locked down, it would just be a phone call. Now we can see each other every week, which is great."

I'm sure Geraldine Dewsbury would have been impressed.

Jessica Staheli

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Scherzer International (SI) has been providing specialized background screening reports since 1993. Our global clients include commercial and investment banks, private equity funds, and many of the largest law and public accounting firms in the world.

With a distinct portfolio of scalable, purpose-specific reports for business transaction due diligence, client acceptance or continuation, employment and regulatory compliance, our services have proven essential for informed decisions and sustainable risk-management.

